

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EURE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

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P 301510Z SEP 76

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6077

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN PRIORITY

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, PFOR, PGOV, UK

SUBJECT: LABOR PARTY CONFERENCE: THUMBS DOWN ON
DIRECT ELECTIONS

REF: LONDON 15271

SUMMARY: LABOR PARTY CONFERENCE, IN ITS THIRD DAY OF
DELIBERATIONS, VOTED OVERWHELMINGLY TO REJECT THE
PRINCIPLE OF DIRECT ELECTIONS TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT,
AS WAS ANTICIPATED. THIS ACTION, HOWEVER, WAS SHOWN TO
BE AN EMPTY GESTURE THE PREVIOUS EVENING WHEN FOREIGN
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SECRETARY CROSLAND TOLD A FRINGE MEETING THAT THE GOVERN-

MENT INTENDS TO GO AHEAD WITH LEGISLATION IMPLEMENTING DIRECT ELECTIONS, REGARDLESS OF HOW CONFERENCE VOTED. ENACTMENT OF LEGISLATION, OF COURSE, DEPENDS ON PARLIAMENT, WHERE TIMELY OUTCOME REMAINS VERY MUCH IN DOUBT. CONFERENCE ALSO ENDORSED TWO RESOLUTIONS OPPOSING RACISM, ONE OF THEM UNANIMOUSLY, AND DISREGARDED NEC RECOMMENDATIONS IN ENDORSING THREE RESOLUTIONS CRITICAL OF CURRENT HOUSING POLICIES AND TWO OTHERS CRITICAL OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES PROGRAMS. AS HAS BEEN THE CASE PREVIOUSLY, NONE OF THESE ACTIONS ARE EXPECTED TO AFFECT GOVERNMENT POLICIES, THOUGH THE GAP BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND PARTY SEEMS TO BE WIDENING. END SUMMARY.

1. MAJOR DEVELOPMENT DURING THIRD DAY OF CONFERENCE SEPTEMBER 29 WAS ITS STRONG REJECTION OF DIRECT ELECTIONS TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT. THIS ACTION WAS ANTICIPATED (REFTEL). CENTERPIECE OF DEBATE WAS NEC STATEMENT REJECTING PRINCIPLE OF DIRECT ELECTIONS AND URGING "GOVERNMENT TO BEAR IN MIND THE DECISION OF ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE LABOR PARTY WHEN IT DISCUSSES THE QUESTION (DIRECT ELECTIONS) WITH ITS EEC PARTNERS." CONFLICTING RESOLUTIONS, THE FIRST OF WHICH "OPPOSES INTRODUCTION OF DIRECT ELECTIONS" BECAUSE THEY WOULD WEAKEN DEMOCRATIC CONTROL IN BRITAIN AND THE SECOND OF WHICH WELCOMED PREPARATIONS FOR SUCH ELECTIONS AND URGED THE NEC TO BEGIN PREPARATIONS FOR THEM, FILLED OUT THE AGENDA ON THIS SUBJECT. OPPONENTS OF DIRECT ELECTIONS FORCED A CARD VOTE ON THE NEC STATEMENT TO UNDERSCORE THEIR STRENGTH -- THEY WON BY A 4.0 TO 2.3 MILLION MARGIN. THE RESOLUTION OPPOSING ELECTIONS WAS THEN CARRIED BY A COMFORTABLE MARGIN ON A SHOW OF HANDS, WHILE THAT FAVORING STEPS IN PREPARATION FOR ELECTIONS WAS REJECTED BY A LIKE EDGE.

2. FOREIGN SECRETARY CROSLAND, SPEAKING TO A SOCIALIST COMMENTARY AUDIENCE THE EVENING OF SEPTEMBER 28, PRE-EMPTED CONFERENCE BY FORCEFULLY ASSERTING THAT CONFERENCE ACTION WOULD IN NO WAY INHIBIT GOVERNMENT PLANS FOR

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TIMELY INTRODUCTION OF THE NECESSARY IMPLEMENTING LEGIS-
LATION. FOR GOVERNMENT "TO GO BACK ON ITS WORD,"
CROSLAND SAID, "WOULD BE AN ACT OF BAD FAITH AND A
BETRAYAL" OF THE EC REFERENDUM.

3. THE CONFERENCE WAS ABLE TO ACHIEVE A RARE CONSENSUS
ON THE ISSUE OF RACISM. A COMPOSITE RESOLUTION EX-
PRESSING CONCERN OVER GROWING INDICATIONS OF BRITISH
RACISM AND CALLING FOR THE GOVERNMENT TO TAKE ACTION
TO COUNTER THIS TENDENCY BY ATTACKING ROOT CAUSES FOR IT
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WAS PASSED UNANIMOUSLY. ANOTHER RESOLUTION CALLING FOR
REPEAL OF THE 1968 AND 1971 IMMIGRATION ACTS WAS EN-

DORSED WITH ONLY TOKEN OPPOSITION. ON OTHER SUBJECTS, CONFERENCE IGNORED NEC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REMISSION OR REJECTION OF COMPOSITE RESOLUTIONS CRITICAL OF GOVERNMENT HOUSING, HEALTH AND SOCIAL SECURITY POLICIES, ASSERTING ITS INDEPENDENCE BY APPROVING THEM ALL.

4. COMMENT. IMPACT OF CONFERENCE DIRECT ELECTION DECISIONS ON GOVERNMENT ACTION, AS CROSLAND INDICATED, WILL BE NIL. HOWEVER, APPROVAL OF IMPLEMENTING LEGISLATION ULTIMATELY DEPENDS ON ITS PASSAGE IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS WHERE THE NEAR TERM OUTLOOK IS PROBLEMATIC. AS DIRECT ELECTION IS A CONSTITUTIONAL QUESTION, COMMITTEE STAGES OF BILL WILL BE HANDLED BY THE ENTIRE HOUSE SITTING AS COMMITTEE, AND THIS WILL PROVIDE OPPONENTS WITH AMPLE ROOM TO APPLY OBSTRUCTIVE TACTICS-- AND CONFERENCE VOTE PROVIDES ADDITIONAL RATIONALE FOR LABOR ANTI-MARKETEERS TO MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO BLOCK LEGISLATION. AT THIS POINT, ODDS ARE NO BETTER THAN 50/50 THAT PARLIAMENT WILL RATIFY DIRECT ELECTIONS ACCORD IN TIME ARRANGE PROCEDURES FOR 1978 TARGET DATE. THE OTHER CONFERENCE ACTIONS FLEW IN THE FACE OF NEC RECOMMENDATIONS AND ADDED FURTHER TO GOVERNMENT'S DISCOMFORT, BUT THEY ARE NOT EXPECTED TO HAVE ANY EFFECT ON ITS POLICIES. THEY CLEARLY ILLUSTRATED, HOWEVER, GROWING GULF BETWEEN LABOR GOVERNMENT AND ITS PARTY BASE.

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